The Concealed Art of The Soul

Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology

Jonardon Ganeri

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If truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, 'tis certain it must lie very deep and abtruse.

—DAVID HUME

Though it be a maxim of the schools that there is no love of a thing unkown, yet I have found that things unknown have a secret influence on the soul.

—THOMAS TRAHERNE

This 'I' is not intimate with itself through and through, but is opaque, and therefore remains a riddle to itself.

—ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

The author, since he has no intention of telling about himself, decided to call the character 'I' as if to conceal him, not having to name him or describe him more than this stark pronoun.

—ITALO CALVINO

Every profound spirit needs a mask.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

1

Hidden in the Cave: The Upaniṣadic Self

> The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious.
>
> Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 1914–16

1.1 The reluctance of the sage

The recalcitrant sages of the Upaniṣads[1] are coy but not covert. They do not, in general, conceal their true beliefs with false words; they are not insincere. Tardiness not trickery is their leading trait, an immense reluctance to 'spill the beans', a coyness rooted not so much in a self-serving secretiveness or a disinclination to share the knowledge that gives them power,[2] but which exists rather as a response to a deep respect for the power of that knowledge, and a recognition of the need not to be frivolous either with the knowledge itself or with its potential recipients. Yājñavalkya, certainly, has about him a degree of furtiveness when he replies to Āryabhāga's demand to be told

[1] All references are to the edition and translation of Patrick Olivelle: *The Early Upaniṣads: An Annotated Text and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Another recent translation, Valerie J. Roebuck's *The Upanisads* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), is also excellent. On the chronology, Olivelle says that, 'any dating of these documents that attempts a precision closer than a few centuries is as stable as a pack of cards' (p. 12). The current consensus is that the prose Bṛhadāraṇyaka [BU] and Chāndogya [CU] are the oldest, and pre-Buddhist; they are also edited texts with different chronological strata, but roughly seventh to sixth centuries BCE. The other three prose Upaniṣads, Taittirīya [TU], Aitareya [AU] and Kauṣītaki [KsU], are probably pre-Buddhist too, and sixth to fifth centuries BCE. Of the more theistic verse Upaniṣads, the order is probably Kena [KeU], Kaṭha [KaU], Īśā [IU], Śvetāśvatara [SU] and Muṇḍaka [MuU], and the date somewhere in the last few centuries BCE. Recent work on the date of the Buddha's death has recommended between 375 and 355 BCE in place of the usually cited 486 BCE.

[2] The prominent exception is SU 6.22: 'This supreme secret was proclaimed during a former age in the Vedānta. One should never disclose it to a person who is not of a tranquil disposition, or who is not one's own son or pupil.'

what happens to a man after he dies: 'My friend, we cannot talk about this in public; let's go and discuss it in private' (BU 3.3.2); or when in response to Janaka's persistent questioning, he panics, thinking, 'The king is really sharp! He has flushed me out of every cover' (BU 4.3.33); or when, having tried to palm off Uṣasta Cākrāyaṇa with a cryptic account of the self, Uṣasta exclaims: 'That's a fine explanation! It's like saying "This is a cow and that is a horse!" Come on, give me a real explanation … of the self that is within all' (BU 3.4.2). But even he displays the more typical mood when he cracks under Gārgī's prolonged interrogation: 'Don't ask too many questions, Gārgī, or your head will shatter apart! You are asking too many questions about a deity about whom one should not ask too many questions. So, Gārgī, do not ask too many questions!' (BU 3.6.1). The sage's reluctance is born not of subterfuge but frustration and, perhaps, fear.

Good use is made of the trope of the reluctant sage by the Upaniṣadic storyteller: to engender in the reader a sense of respect for the profundity of the wisdom about to be imparted, as well as to convey the idea that a gift is being given and a very precious one at that. More particularly, though, the reluctant sage is made to speak as one who is having his arm twisted, and the whole tone is 'Look, I didn't want to tell you this, but you have forced me to.' The reluctant sage seems with his reluctance to want to divest himself of responsibility, implying that the pupil alone is responsible for whatever consequences may follow the disclosure. Often indeed it is the virtuosity of the pupil that elicits this disclosure, an exceptional feat of endurance or ascetiscism, an uncanny disinterest in the pleasures of life. Virtuosity, but not necessarily virtuousness—it is not so much the moral worthiness of the pupil that turns the trick, but their apparent willingness to sacrifice all, their readiness to accept the consequences without complaint. For then the sage can truly think 'You took this upon yourself—don't blame me!'

Reluctance and fear are clearly intertwined in the story of Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa. We learn from *Ṛgveda* 1.116.12 of a sage Dadhyañc who has discovered the secret truth called the 'honey-doctrine' and who is sworn to secrecy by Indra, with the threat that if he were to disclose this doctrine Indra would cut off his head. The Aśvins want the secret but also know that Dadhyañc will not risk his neck to divulge it. They hit upon the following brilliant contrivance: they themselves cut off Dadhyañc's head and replace it with the head of a horse. Now, when Dadhyañc reveals the secret and Indra severs his horse's head, the Aśvins can restore to him his

original form—so that he will have revealed the secret and still evaded Indra's wrath! This is the story alluded to in the following verse:

> As thunder discloses the rain, O Heroes,
> I disclose that wonderful skill you displayed for gain;
> When Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa revealed the honey,
> Through the horse's head to you.
>
> You fixed a horse's head, O Aśvins,
> On Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa;
> True to his word, O mighty ones,
> He revealed to you Tvaṣṭṛ's honey,
> That remains a secret with you.
>
> (BU 2.5.16–17)

With the head substitution the Aśvins displayed a 'wonderful skill' indeed, an ingenuity that diffused Indra's threat and coaxed the reluctant Dadhyañc into revealing to them the honey-truth, a doctrine about the self that is the honey of all beings. Not that he had any objection in principle to telling them, nor did they trick him into an indiscretion—it was fear alone that held Dadhyañc's tongue.

Let's next take up the story of Naciketas, the retelling of which in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad develops earlier renditions in *Ṛgveda* 10.135 and *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.11.8.1–6.[3] The kernel of the story is the lecture Naciketas receives from Yama on the topic of the self. The framing narrative tells how Yama came, reluctantly, to be giving that lecture. The pious boy Naciketas watches as his father performs the *sarvamedha* or 'sacrifice of all', a ritual in which one gives away all one's most important things as sacrificial gifts. Naciketas notices that the cows being given are not, in fact, the best; indeed 'they have been milked dry, they are totally barren—"joyless" are called the worlds to which a man goes who gives *them* as gifts' (KaU 1.3). Perhaps it is with the intention of exposing his father's hypocrisy that Naciketas then asks to whom he, Naciketas, will be given, and he twice repeats the question until his father yells back 'I'll give you to Death!' (KaU 1.4). With equanimity Naciketas accepts his fate and goes to the abode of Yama, the god of death, where he remains without food for three days waiting for Yama to return. Yama is conscious that he has shown a Brahmin great

[3] See H. D. Velankar, 'The Ṛgvedic origin of the story of Naciketas', in *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la Mémoire de Louis Renou* (Paris: Éditions e. de Boccard, 1968), pp. 763–72.

disrespect in allowing him to stay at his home without hospitality and therefore grants Naciketas three wishes of his own choosing. In the Taittirīya rendition, but not in the Kaṭha, there is a suggestion that Naciketas tricked Yama, deliberately choosing to arrive when he knew Yama would be away, thereby manufacturing the obligation, and indeed that he did this on the advice of his repentant father. Be that as it may, the three gifts Naciketas asked for were to be allowed to return home to his now pacified father, to be told how to perform effectively the fire-altar ritual and render permanent its results, and finally to be told what happens to a man after he dies:

> There is this doubt about a man who is dead.
> 'He exists,' say some; others, 'He exists not.'
> I want to know this, so please teach me.
> This is the third of my three wishes.
>
> (KaU 1.20)

Of the three wishes, Yama executes the first without hesitation, assuring Naciketas that he will return home to a father who will be affable in the future. Yama also delivers the second wish without fuss, explaining the method of constructing the fire-altar and adding that this fire-altar will henceforth bear the name 'Naciketas'. When it comes to the third wish, however, Yama is suddenly reluctant:

> As to this even the gods of old had doubts,
> for it's hard to understand, it's a subtle doctrine.
> Make, Naciketas, another wish.
> Do not press me! Release me from this.
>
> (KaU 1.21)

> Choose sons and grandsons who'd live a hundred years!
> Plenty of livestock and elephants, horses and gold!
> Choose as your domain a wide expanse of earth!
> And you yourself live as many autumns as you wish!
>
> (KaU 1.23)

> And if you would think this is an equal wish:
> You may choose wealth together with a long life;
> Achieve prominence, Naciketas, in this wide world;
> And I will make you enjoy your desires at will.
>
> (KaU 1.24)

You may ask freely for all those desires,
Hard to obtain in this mortal world;
Look at these lovely girls, with chariots and lutes,
Girls of this sort are unobtainable by men—
I'll give them to you; you'll have them wait on you;
But about death please don't ask me, Naciketas.

(KaU 1.25)

Yama's extreme reluctance to speak of death has a beseeching, desperate note, but of what can he be so afraid? Is it that Yama, the god of death, is being forced to speak about himself, to tell the secret of his own name? For Naciketas is certainly right that if even the gods of old had doubts about the matter then no one but Death himself is fit to explain it (KaU 1.22). Yama bribes, cajoles, implores Naciketas but in the end cannot refuse him. The culminative effect of the frame narrative is to box Yama into a corner where he has no option but to give his speech in spite of all his trepidation. Whether or not he has been deceived, his unwillingness to break the laws of good custom and indeed his own word, finally outweighs his immense reluctance to speak. Yama compliments Naciketas on his wisdom and steadfastness (KaU 2.1–11) and begins his discourse on the self.

A third example of Upaniṣadic reluctance is met with in the famous story about Indra and Virocana, in Chāndogya 8.7.1–8.12.6. The gods and demons both have heard tell that Prajāpati speaks of a self 'by discovering which one obtains all the worlds, and all one's desires are fulfilled' (CU 8.7.2). Like two polar explorers, the god Indra and the demon Virocana set out carrying firewood and live as celibates in Prajāpati's presence. Thirty-two years later Prajāpati finally asks them what they want, and being told of their quest to discover the self he fobs them off with an answer he knows to be false:

'Look at yourselves in a pan of water. And let me know if there is anything you do not perceive about yourselves.' So they looked into a pan of water.

Prajāpati asked them: 'What do you see?' And they replied: 'Sir, we see here our entire body (*ātman*), a perfect likeness down to the very hairs of the body, down to the very nails.'

Prajāpati told them then: 'Adorn yourself beautifully, dress well, and spruce yourself up, and then look into a pan of water.' So they adorned themselves beautifully, dressed well, and spruced themselves up, and then looked into a pan of water.

Prajāpati asked them: 'What do you see?' And they replied: 'Sir, as the two of us here are beautifully adorned, well dressed, and all spruced up, in exactly the same way are these, sir, beautifully adorned, well dressed, and all spruced up.'

'That is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*,' Prajāpati told them. And the two of them left with contented hearts.

Seeing the two depart, Prajāpati observed: 'There they go, without learning about the self, without discovering the self!'

(CU 8.8.1–4).

To his credit, Indra soon realizes that the mirrored self cannot be the self for which he seeks (CU 8.9.1—he realizes that if the external appearance can be made beautiful, so too can it become lame and crippled), and he returns for further instruction. Prajāpati makes him wait another thirty-two years and then tries to fob him off again, this time with 'The one who goes happily about in a dream—that is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*' (CU 8.10.1). Indra falls for it a second time but again returns unconvinced. He is again told to wait thirty-two years and is then once more fobbed off, with 'When one is fast asleep, totally collected and serene, and sees no dreams—that is the self; that is the immortal, that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*' (CU 8.11.1). Indra goes away happy, again returning when he realizes his error. Prajāpati now says 'I will explain it to you further, but only under the following condition—stay here for another five years' (CU 8.11.3). Indra waits and his patience is finally rewarded.

But what are we to make of Prajāpati's astonishing reluctance, of his willingness to deceive not just the demon Virocana but Indra too, of his insistence on long periods of harsh living as a condition for receiving his instruction? And why did Indra believe Prajāpati's final answer, when he might well by now have wondered whether he was not simply being fobbed off one more time? Indra is not doing anything that might better ready him for the new revelation during the long years; indeed the only times he seems to improve his understanding are when he goes away content and then begins to question; in short, when he is *not* at Prajāpati's home. There is, to be sure, a graded teaching about the nature of the self in this Upaniṣadic story, and it is very successful as pedagogic narrative. Indeed, careful attention to narrative form here gives much insight into the nature of the 'self-knowledge' being sought. What is remarkable is the literary

device used here, in which progressively more sophisticated accounts of the self are presented as the grudging concessions of a recalcitrant god. Indra passes through a sequence of doctrines about the self, each one being an improvement on its predecessor, and perhaps one of the things the story is teaching us is that some such procession is necessary in the quest for self-knowledge. Among two doctrines or propositions, let us say that the first is a 'preparatory condition' for the second if understanding that the first is *false* is required of someone who is to be in a position even to speculate upon the truth or falsity of the second.[4] Indra could not begin even to appreciate the virtues of the less obvious doctrine that the true self is the self one encounters in a dream had he not already understood as wrong the more obvious idea about the true self being the body's reflected image or one's appearance to others. And now Prajāpati's reluctance might be seen as following from a further idea, that for one doctrine about the self to be a preparatory condition of another, it must not merely be understood that it is false, but this understanding must be the result of one's own personal investigation and discovery.[5] If that is so, then Prajāpati could not have told Indra the final doctrine straight away, nor could he have told him that any of the preceding doctrines was false. He could only 'feed' Indra a preparatory doctrine and wait to see if Indra discovers it to be false. Prajāpati's reluctance, then, is of a different order than the fearful silence of Dadhyañc or the cautious reserve of Yama; it is a reluctance born of didactic necessity when what is being taught is the nature of the self.

If we compare the Upaniṣadic representation of the sage with Plato's representation of Socrates, we see that the sage's reluctance is no ordinary reluctance. Rather, it is a feigned (perhaps even ironic) reluctance, designed to encourage and motivate the hearer or reader in the direction of a quest for the truth, a concealed truth about a hidden self. To borrow a term from Kierkegaard, the persona of the reluctant sage is a literary device for the 'indirect communication' of a truth about the soul.[6] Later in this book,

[4] A preparatory condition is thus the inverse of a presupposition, something that must be *true* for the sentence presupposing it to be evaluable as either true or false.

[5] It is said more than once that 'This self cannot be grasped by teachings or by intelligence or even by great learning' (KaU 2.23; MuU 3.2.3). But compare KaU 2.8, which seems to assert precisely the opposite: 'Yet one cannot gain access to it, unless someone else teaches it. For it is smaller than the size of an atom, a thing beyond the realm of reason.'

[6] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

I will compare Prajāpati's approach to teaching about the self with that of the Buddha (see chapter 4).

1.2 Metaphors of the cave

And what did reluctant Yama, the lord of death, tell Naciketas? He told him of the existence of a hidden self, a self the discovery of which will free a man from grief and sorrow. He told him of a self that lies 'hidden in the cave' (*nihito guhāyām*):

> Finer than the finest, larger than the largest,
> is the self that lies here hidden
> in the cave of a living being.
> Without desires and free from sorrow,
> a man perceives by the creator's grace
> the grandeur of the self.
>
> (KaU 2.20)

The metaphor of the cave as the hiding place of the soul is to be repeated several times in the Kaṭha (2.12, 3.1), and other Upaniṣads appeal to the same formula:

> Truth and knowledge,
> The infinite and *brahman*:
> A man who knows them as
> hidden in the cave,
> hidden in the highest heaven;
> Attains all his desires,
> together with the wise *brahman*.
>
> (TU 2.1.1)

> It is large, heavenly, of inconceivable form;
> yet it appears more minute than the minute.
> It is farther than the farthest,
> yet it is here at hand;
> It is right here within those who see,
> hidden within the cave.
>
> (MuU 3.1.7)

What is this cave wherein the self hides? The metaphor is absent from the two earliest Upaniṣads—Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya—which speak instead of a 'space within the heart' (*hṛdaya ākāśaḥ*), and that is not a metaphor but an important element of early Upaniṣadic physiology and psychology. Patrick Olivelle (p. 23) has summarized well the older view:

> The heart has a cavity at the centre and is surrounded by the pericardium. Channels or veins run from the heart to the pericardium and to other parts of the body. The cavity of the heart is the seat of the vital powers and the self and plays a central role in the explanations of the three states of awareness—waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep—as well as of death. In sleep, the cognitive powers distributed throughout the body during the waking hours are gathered together in the cavity of the heart. The space of this cavity is homologized with cosmic space (see CU 3.12.7–9), and in the dream state the person travels about this space seeing and enjoying the same type of things that he experienced while awake. During deep and dreamless sleep, the self slips out of that cardiac space and enters the veins going from the heart to the pericardium; there it remains oblivious to everything (see BU 2.1; 4.3–4). At death the self, together with the vital powers, departs from the heart along a channel and exits through either the crown of the head (TU 1.6) or the eye (BU 4.4.2).

Many commentators identify later references to a 'cave' with this space within the heart (Olivelle's translation often amplifies the phrase 'hidden in the cave' as 'hidden in the cave *of the heart*'). Perhaps, however, the allusion to a cave is not to be taken quite so literally, but rather simply as a metaphor for the idea that the self is hidden.[7] The noun *guhā* 'cave', deriving from a verbal root *guh–*, whose meaning is 'to cover, hide, conceal, keep secret', carries the senses of 'a cave, cavern, hiding place; hiding, concealing', just as the participial form *guhya* denotes 'to be concealed, covered or kept secret; mysterious; a secret, mystery'.[8] That is the sense it has when the same

[7] Compare Democritus' famous statement: 'Of truth we know nothing, for truth is in a well' (fr. 117; Diog. L. ix, 72). Democritus (fl. 430 BCE) is reported to have travelled widely, and Diogenes Laertius informs us that 'Some say that he associated with the "naked philosophers" in India' (Diog. L. ix, 35).

[8] Apte, sv. *guh-*, *guhya*. J. L. Mehta, 'The Ṛgveda: text and interpretation', in his *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: Indian Council for Philosophical Research, 1990), p. 283: 'Another myth with a metaphor at its core is that of the demon Vala, the encloser, the cavity that shuts in. Here again we have a common noun turned into a proper name, what appears to us today the mythologization of an abstract idea, in this case, that of enclosing or encaving.'

image surfaces in the *Mahābhārata* as part of a description of the elusiveness of *dharma*, where an identification with the space within the heart would clearly be out of place:

> The scriptures are many and divided; the *dharmaśāstras* are many and different. Nobody is called a sage until and unless he holds a different view [from anyone else]. The truth of *dharma* lies concealed in the dark cave.
>
> (MB 1.191.25)

In this it resonates with those other metaphors of concealment that set the tone of the Upaniṣadic text:

> The face of truth is covered
> with a golden dish.
> Open it, O Pūṣan, for me,
> a man faithful to the truth.
> Open it, O Pūṣan, for me to see.
>
> (BU 5.15.1; IU 15)

> Hidden in all the beings,
> this self is not visibly displayed.
> Yet, people of keen vision see him,
> with eminent and sharp minds.
>
> (KaU. 3.12)

That the soul is concealed—this is the force of the phrase 'hidden in the cave' as it occurs in the Kaṭha, Taittirīya and Muṇḍaka. The self within is not transparent; it stands in need of discovery. Discovery by whom? By oneself, presumably. But what can hide the self from itself? And how, if concealed, is it to be disclosed? The Upaniṣadic author buries the self in order to make possible a project of self-discovery, but must not bury the self *too* deeply or the viability of that very project will be undermined.[9]

[9] As Śaṅkara was well aware, a paradox threatens: for inquiry into the self to be possible, the self must be neither already known nor altogether unknown. *The Brahmasūtra Śāṅkara Bhāṣya*, ed. with commentaries N. A. K. Shastri and V. L. Shastri Pansikar (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1917), pp. 78–83 (under *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.1). On this version of the paradox of inquiry and its later elaborations, see Amber Carpenter and Jonardon Ganeri, 'Meno goes to India: The new paradox of inquiry' (forthcoming).

1.3 What conceals the self?

To a modern mind the problem of the self's concealment may seem obscure. Am I not condemned forever to be in my own company? The more immediate problem seems to be not how to find the self but how to escape it, in the all-too-brief moments when one 'loses oneself' in a reverie or film or good novel.

One straightforward idea is that the self is just so small that it is very hard to spot. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, the self is compared with a grain of rice or barley (BU 5.6.1). In the Chāndogya, it is 'smaller than a grain of rice or barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller even than a millet grain or a millet kernel' (CU 3.14.3); but it is also the width of a span (CU 5.18.1). In the Kaṭha, again, the self is the size of a thumb (KaU 2.12, 6.17).

Then again we are told several times that the self pervades and saturates the body that hides it:

> This very breath, which is the self consisting of intelligence, penetrates this bodily self up to the very hairs of the body, up to the very nails. Just as a razor within a case or a termite within a termite hill, so this self consisting of intelligence penetrates this bodily self up to the very hairs of the body, up to the very nails.
>
> (KsU 4.20)

> Like oil in sesame seeds and butter in curds, like water in the riverbed and fire in the fire-drills, so, when one seeks it with truth and austerity, one grasps that self (*ātman*) in the body (*ātman*)—that all-pervading self, which is contained [in the body] like butter in milk.
>
> (SU 2.15–16)

That is the theme too in a very famous passage which speaks of the self as having five 'sheaths':

> Different from and lying within this man formed from the essence of food is the self consisting of lifebreath, which suffuses that man completely … Different from and lying within this self consisting of breath is the self consisting of mind, which suffuses this other self completely … Different from and lying within this self consisting of mind is the self consisting of perception, which suffuses this other self completely … Different from and lying within this self consisting of perception is the self consisting of bliss, which suffuses this other self completely.
>
> (TU 2.3.2–5)

The view that the soul has the same extension as the body has been maintained by the Jainas, one proprioceptive argument being that the soul must always be in contact with the senses and the senses are located on the body's surface.[10] Even if we are reluctant to take literally the notion that the soul has spatial boundaries, the argument points in the direction of a second way to make sense of the idea that the self is hidden by the body, namely that it does not enter the 'field' of perception of any of the sense faculties. For, as the Kaṭha says:

> The Self-existent One pierced the apertures outward,
> therefore, one looks out, and not into oneself.
> A certain wise man in search of immortality,
> turned his sight inward and saw the self within.
>
> (KaU 4.1)

The self, then, is *mis*-placed; and it is not only because the self is on the 'wrong side' of the senses that it cannot be sensed but also because it lacks the sensible qualities:

> It has no sound or touch,
> no appearance, taste, or smell.
>
> (KaU 3.15ab)

> Not by speech, not by the mind,
> not by sight can he be grasped.
> How else can that be perceived,
> other than by saying 'He is!'
>
> (KaU. 6.12)

If the self fails to be an object for the senses, however, how is it to become an object of desire, for desire seems to track the sensory (on seeing something, one wishes either to obtain or avoid it)? This question leads us to an important passage at the beginning of Chāndogya chapter 8, a preparatory passage for the story of Indra and Virocana to come (see above).

[10] In the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* we find an argument that the soul is conscious only of that with which the body is in contact (VS 3.2.1, 5.2.15–16). VS 7.1.28–29, however, state that the soul is 'large' (*mahat*), which the commentators take to imply omnipresence (*parama-mahattva*). For discussion: Keiichi Miyamoto, *The Metaphysics and Epistemology of the Early Vaiśeṣikas* (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1996), chapter 2.

Here the discovery of the self is related to the discovery of true (*satya*) desires masked by false (*anṛta*) ones. The passage begins in a by now familiar way:

> Now, here in this fort of *brahman* there is a small lotus, a dwelling place, and within it, a small place. In that space there is something—and that's what you should try to discover, that's what you should seek to perceive.
>
> (CU 8.1.1)

What is the something? It is the self:

> That is the self free from evils—free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desires and intentions become true … . So, those here in this world who depart without having discovered the self and these true desires do not obtain complete freedom of movement in any of the worlds, whereas those here in this world who depart after discovering the self and these true desires obtain complete freedom of movement in all the worlds.
>
> (CU 8.1.5–6)

The true desires—and with them the true self—are, however, hidden by other, false desires:

> Now, these true desires are masked by the false. Although they are true, they have the false for a mask, for when someone close to him departs from this world, he doesn't get to see him here. On the other hand, people who are close to him, whether they are alive or dead, as well as anything else that he desires but does not get—all that he finds by going there, for these true desires of his masked by the false are located there.
>
> Take, for example, a hidden treasure of gold. People who do not know the terrain, even when they pass right over it time and again, would not discover it. In exactly the same way, all these creatures, even though they go there every day, do not discover this world of *brahman*, for they are led astray by the false.
>
> (CU 8.3.1–2)

The self, we are now told, is just too close to be seen. Or rather, being present *whenever* we see, we do not see *it*. Are the false desires the 'outward desires', mentioned in Katha 4.2, pursued by fools who seek the stable in the unstable? The senses, those outward apertures, are forever drawing us away from what is indeed close at hand. As for the true desire, is it a desire for that which is stable (and indeed immortal), a desire not for the thing seen but for the reason there is seeing, for the principle behind sight, a

desire not for the thinking but for the reason there is thought? If so, then no wonder that without knowing the terrain, we pass over it time and time again.

This idea receives support from a passage in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, where Yājñavalkya also distinguishes two sorts of desire, and with them two kinds of self. When a person acts in accordance with his ordinary desires he is made good by good action and made bad by bad action:

> What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and on how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action. And so people say: 'A person here consists simply of desire.' A man resolves in accordance with his desire, acts in accordance with his resolve, and turns out to be in accordance with his action.
>
> (BU 4.4.5)

This passage echoes Yājñavalka's furtive advice to Āryabhāga in BU 3.3.2, where he likewise taught that a man is made by what he does—the earliest statement of the doctrine of *karma* (see also Appendix B). But Yājñavalkya goes on now to speak of another sort of man, a man whose only desire is the self:

> Now, a man who does not desire—who is without desires, who is freed from desires, whose desires are fulfilled, whose only desire is the self (*ātmakāma*)—his vital functions do not depart. *Brahman* he is, and to *brahman* he goes. On this point there is the following verse:
>
> When they are all banished,
> those desires lurking in one's heart;
> Then a mortal becomes immortal,
> and attains *brahman* in this world.
>
> (BU 4.4.6)

The true desire of such a person is not a desire for anything sensible, but a desire for the self, a desire for the principle by which there is sensing. This is the self of which the Kauṣītaki says (KsU 3.8), 'it does not become more by good actions or in any way less by bad actions'. This is the true self hidden in the cave, the cave of the body and its embodied desires.

Action unmotivated by desire is a transparent expression of the self. Desire conceals the self. These Upaniṣadic ideas about concealment by

desire find their fullest statement in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where action without desire is held to constitute the soul, while actions produced in response to desire destroy it:

In action alone is your proper interest, never in [its] fruits. Let not your motive be the fruit of action, nor your attachment to inaction.

(BG 2.47)

As fire is enveloped in smoke, and a mirror [obscured] by dust, as an embryo is concealed by the womb, so is this [self] covered by that [desire]. Knowledge is concealed by this perpetual enemy of the knower, this insatiable fire in the form of desire, o son-of-Kuntī.

(BG 3.38–9)

1.4 The self is not an object of consciousness

The metaphor of the self as hidden in the cave, I will now argue, is best interpreted as giving voice to the doctrine that the self is not a possible object of consciousness. Our search for the self among the objects of consciousness is a forlorn one, and indeed is ill-conceived. If the self is not within the purview of the senses and mind, that is not because it has nothing to do with sensing and thinking; in fact, just the opposite—being what makes sensing and thinking possible, it is 'too close' to be seen. Not being an object among others in the world of comprehended objects, why shouldn't it best be described through the use of paradoxical conceptions?[11]

That the self the Upaniṣadic sages were in search of is not itself an object of consciousness follows from Yājñavalkya's clever explanation of the matter to his wife, Maitreyī. The account occurs twice in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka: at 2.4.14, and again at 4.5.15, where a short but important elucidatory passage is inserted into the text. Here is 2.4.14:

When there is a duality of some kind, then the one can smell the other, the one can see the other, the one can hear the other, the one can greet the other, the one can think of the other, and the one can perceive the other. When, however, the

[11] For example, CU 3.14.3. On the Upaniṣadic use of paradox: Joel Brereton, 'The Upaniṣads', in W. T. de Bary and I. Bloom (eds), *Approaches to the Asian Classics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 115–35.

Whole has become one's very self (*ātman*), then who is there for one to smell and by what means? Who is there for one to see and by what means? Who is there for one to hear and by what means? Who is there for one to greet and by what means? Who is there for one to think and by what means? Who is there for one to perceive and by what means? By what means can one perceive him by means of whom one perceives this whole world? Look—by what means can one perceive the perceiver?

(BU 2.4.14)

The text of 4.5.15 inserts between the last and the penultimate sentences:

About this self (*ātman*), one can only say 'not—, not—. ' He is ungraspable, for he cannot be grasped. He is undecaying, for he is not subject to decay. He has nothing sticking to him, for he does not stick to anything. He is not bound; yet he neither trembles in fear nor suffers injury.

The insertion tells us what it is that the argument is meant to show—that the self is not an object of thought, nor even of reference, or as Yājñavalkya even more bluntly explains to Uṣasta Cākrāyaṇa:

You can't see the seer who does the seeing; you can't hear the hearer who does the hearing; you can't think of the thinker who does the thinking; and you can't perceive the perceiver who does the perceiving. The self within all is this self of yours.

(BU 3.5.2)

Yājñavalkya's clever argument explains the transition from 'the perceiver does not perceive himself' to 'the perceiver is not perceived'. It is taken for granted that perceiving is an anti-reflexive relation, but it does not yet follow that the perceiver is not and cannot be perceived, that the relation is anti-symmetric (i.e. that if one is a perceiver, then one is not a thing perceived). The possibility to be excluded is that A perceives B and B perceives A, or some wider circle of perception. Yājñavalkya argues by universalization of the relata, supposing first that the perceiver is the All and then that the perceived is the whole world. A perceiver who is All, clearly, leaves nothing to perceive and is therefore not itself perceived by something other than itself; similarly, if the All is perceived, and perceiving is anti-reflexive, then the perceiver cannot be among the world of things perceived.

The Upaniṣadic self is not, then, an object of consciousness. To say that it is instead the subject of consciousness will not advance the discussion very far, for this has been granted all along; what we have now done is to reject the idea that the subject of consciousness can be thought of as an

object of consciousness. Indeed, we are now better able to make sense of Prajāpati's graded instruction to Indra. Of the three bogus accounts of the self he offered, the first two are attempts to represent the self as a possible *object* of consciousness. Perhaps it is an object of sensory awareness, the reflected image in a pool of water? Indra is not fooled. Perhaps, then, if not a sensory object, it is an object of dream consciousness, 'the one who goes happily about in a dream' (CU 8.10.1)? Indra takes his time, but sees through the ruse. So let us give up on the idea of the self as an object of consciousness, and say instead that it is the residue that is there in dreamless, contentless sleep—but this 'self', Indra clearly saw, is not a self at all: 'this self as just explained, you see, does not perceive itself fully as, "I am this"; it does not even know any of these beings here. It has become completely annihilated' (CU 8.11.1).

Finally, Prajāpati provides an account of that self by discovering which one obtains all the worlds and all one's desires are fulfilled:

> Now, when this sight here gazes into space, that is the seeing person, the faculty of sight enables one to see. The one who is aware: 'Let me smell this'—that is the self; the faculty of smell enables him to smell. The one who is aware: 'Let me say this'—that is the self; the faculty of speech enables him to speak. The one who is aware: 'Let me listen to this'—that is the self; the faculty of hearing enables him to hear. The one who is aware: 'Let me think about this'—that is the self; the mind is his divine faculty of sight. This very self rejoices as it perceives with his mind, with that divine sight, those objects of desire found in the world of brahman. It is this self that the gods venerate, as a result of which they have obtained all the worlds, and have had all their desires fulfilled. Likewise, when someone discovers this self and comes to perceive it, he will obtain all the worlds and have all his desires fulfilled.
>
> (CU 8.12.4–6)[12]

[12] I hear a similar explanation in Proclus, in his commentary on Euclid's *Elements*: 'And indeed prior to both of these [cognitions and desires], there is something unitary in the soul, which often says "I am perceiving", "I am reasoning", "I have appetite", and "I will". It is conscious of all these activities and cooperates with them.' Trans. Richard Sorabji, in *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD* (London: Duckworth, 2004), vol. 1, p. 151. Again, Roderick Chisholm: 'There are many references in literature to a discovery … which seems to be of the first importance but which can be put only in some such sentence as "I am me". What is discovered in such cases? … It is the discovery one makes when one is first aware of the unity of consciousness; it is thus a discovery about those things one has been directly attributing to oneself. One suddenly becomes aware of the fact that they are all being attributed to the *same* thing … . And *how* does one come to see this? It would be correct to say: "One has only to consider it to see that it is true." But it is, apparently, something that many people never happen to consider.' Roderick M. Chisholm, *The First Person: An Essay on Reference and Intentionality* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981), p. 90.

The conception of self described here is distinct from and an improvement over two others: the conception of self as agent, and the conception of self as controller. The agentive self is the one who sees, the one who thinks, the one:

> By whom impelled, by whom compelled,
> does the mind soar forth?
> By whom enjoined does the breath,
> march on as the first?
> By whom is this speech impelled,
> with which people speak?
> And who is the god that joins
> the sight and hearing?
>
> (KaU 1.1)

The controller self is the self who rides the body-chariot:

> Know the self as a rider in a chariot,
> and the body, as simply the chariot.
> Know the intellect as the charioteer,
> and the mind, as simply the reins.
>
> (KaU 3.3)

> The senses, they say, are the horses,
> and sense objects are the paths around them;
> He who is linked to the body, senses, and mind,
> the wise proclaim as the one who enjoys.
>
> (KaU. 3.4)

The self described by Prajāpati is no mere agent, no mere controller. It is the one who stands still, observing itself as it watches, as it hears and thinks. It is not merely the one who sees, nor the one who decides to look, but the one who is aware: 'let me see'. It is not a detached or impassive self, disengaged from its own desires and actions, but it is aware of itself even as it pursues them—it is that in virtue of which the subject of consciousness is self-conscious, something that is, necessarily, not itself an object of consciousness.[13]

[13] The idea can be traced through Schopenhauer to Wittgenstein, and from him to more recent writers, such as Sidney Shoemaker. See Appendix A.

1.5 The hidden connection between one self and all

There is a hidden truth about this hidden self, the self that looks out from the body's nine portals but is not itself a possible object of gaze. The *Upaniṣad*—the 'hidden connection' or 'secret teaching'[14]—is that the self that gazes out from within my body is the same as the self that gazes out from within yours. The principle (*brahman*) behind thinking is the same for each and every thinking self (*ātman*). Indeed it is this principle that the self truly consists in, this 'by knowing which a man comes to know this whole world' (MuU 1.3), the 'highest object of the teachings on hidden connections, an object rooted in austerity and the knowledge of the self' (SU 1.16). This is what Yama, the lord of death, taught Naciketas:

> As the single wind, entering living beings,
> adapts its appearance to match that of each;
> So the single self within each being,
> adapts its appearance to match that of each,
> yet remains quite distinct.
>
> As the sun, the eye of the whole world,
> is not stained by visual faults external to it;
> So the single self within every being,
> is not stained by the suffering of the world,
> being quite distinct from it.
>
> (KaU 5.10–1)

The concealed Upaniṣadic self is an impersonal self, the same for all. Knowing this, how could the various happenings that befall one as one threads a path through life matter so much? How could they be invested with personal significance to one who knows that one is not more *this* person than *that*? With a robust sense of self, one has to be content with one's own pleasures and pains; with only an impersonal sense of self, the pleasures (and also pains) of everyone are one's own: 'You who know this self here, the one common to all men, as somehow *distinct*—you eat food. But when someone venerates this self here, the one common to all men, as measuring the size of a span and as *beyond all measure*, he eats food within all the worlds, all the beings, and all the selves' (CU 5.18.1).

[14] For analyses of the etymology, see the bibliography cited by Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, p. 24, n. 29.

That the true self is the same within each of us follows from the rule of substitution (*ādeśa*) which the sage Āruṇi taught to his son Śvetaketu (CU 6.1.1–7). In grammar and ritual, a rule of substitution tells us when one word or object can stand in for another, it being generally understood that the substitute resembles and behaves like the original.[15] Olivelle comments that 'such rules within the Upaniṣadic tradition are said to be "secret", thus approximating the meaning of *Upaniṣad*' (p. 501). Here is what Āruṇi told his recently educated and overly proud son:

'Śvetaketu, here you are my son, swell-headed, thinking yourself to be learned, and arrogant; so you must have surely asked about that rule of substitution (*ādeśa*) by which one hears what has not been heard before, thinks of what has not been thought of before, and perceives what has not been perceived before?' 'How indeed does that rule of substitution work, sir?' 'It is like this, son. By means of just one lump of clay one would perceive everything made of clay—the transformation (*vikāra*) is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: "It's clay." It is like this, son. By means of just one copper trinket one would perceive everything made of copper—the transformation is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: "It's copper." It is like this, son. By means of just one nail-cutter one would perceive everything made of iron—the transformation is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: "It's iron." That son, is how this rule of substitution works.'

(CU 6.1.3–6)

Thereupon Āruṇi teaches Śvetaketu how to look for the hidden core of things, the sap pervading the tree, the seed in a banyan fruit, the salt in salt-water, and repeatedly he says, 'The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self. And that['s how] you are (*tat tvam asi*), Śvetaketu' (CU 6.8.7).[16] Knowing the 'archetype' or

[15] Eivind Kahrs, *Indian Semantic Analysis: The 'nirvacana' Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter 5. See also my 'The ritual roots of moral reason,' in Kevin Schilbrack (ed.), *Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 207–33.

[16] Olivelle's translation of the famous equation *tat tvam asi* is controversial; it is more normally rendered 'You are that', the neuter pronoun *tat* construed anaphorically to back-refer to *brahman*. Olivelle argues, following Brereton, that the rules of Vedic syntax do not permit a neuter pronoun to stand in opposition to a masculine noun (*tvam*, 'you'). He therefore renders *tat* adverbially. Joel Brereton, '*Tat tvam asi* in context', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 136 (1986): 98–109; Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, pp. 560–1. At least one critic has objected, however, that in interpreting texts, principles of philosophical charity sometimes override syntax; see Stephen H. Phillips, 'Engagement with Sanskrit philosophical texts', in Rita Sherma and Arvind Sharma (eds), *Hinduism and Hermeneutics: Towards a Pluralistic Discourse in the Study of Religion* (New York: Oxford

'model', and the rule that tells us how to derive the new using the old as a pattern,[17] puts us in a position to gain knowledge of the new. Here the term 'minute essence' (*aṇiman*) is used in the 'vanilla essence' sense, implying an extract fine and minute. Elsewhere, the metaphor of the salt in salt-water carries more the idea of 'self' as a mass term, referring to a single but distributed spread of cognition:

> When a chunk of salt is thrown in water, it dissolves into that very water, and it cannot be picked up in any way. Yet, from whichever place one may take a sip, the salt is there! In the same way this Immense Being has no limit or boundary and is a compact mass (*ghana*) of perception (*vijñāna*).
>
> (BU 2.4.12)

This passage, which immediately precedes Yājñavalkya's clever explanation of why the perceiver cannot be perceived, hints at a further reason why the self is not a possible object of consciousness—lacking a proper boundary (limit, surface), it cannot be pinned down. All we succeed in doing, when we look for the self within, is to sample cognitions, much as we sample the salt-water or the chunk of salt. Knowing this to be the 'essence' of the self, and knowing the rule by which one self is substituted for another (what has to change, what remains constant), we derive knowledge of all.

Knowing oneself is a matter of knowing the quintessence of thinking, and this is common to all. Given indeed that the self is not an object, what other story could one tell? For it follows that no criterion for the individuation of objects could be used to individuate distinct selves. The 'thin' self we discover in the phenomenology of thinking itself is not the 'thick' self supported by differences between individuals with respect to the contents of their thoughts (see further the end of chapter 7). Indeed, and ironically, it is nevertheless a self behind which one can hide. Italo Calvino has made the point well: 'Just as the author, since he has no intention of telling about himself, decided to call the character "I" as if to

University Press, 2007). Valerie Roebuck is similarly sceptical: '[T]here are numerous places in the Upaniṣads where the authors have departed from the strict rules of grammatical gender to make a teaching point.' Valerie J. Roebuck, *The Upaniṣads* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 423, n. 12. She translates CU 6.8.7 as, 'This subtle part is what all this has as self. It is truth: it is the self. *You* are that, Śvetaketu.' There is room to argue that in fact no departure from grammar is involved, that nominal sentences do not always demand agreement in gender.

[17] Compare the use in ritual theory of the notion of *tantra*; cf. my 'The ritual roots of moral reason' (ibid.).

conceal him, not having to name him or describe him more than this stark pronoun'.[18] The Upaniṣadic self is a mask behind which individuals can hide their individuality, even as that individuality masks the self.

1.6 Finding the self in the periphery of thinking

If the self had simply been lost, we might have hoped to find it again. As matters stand, we are in worse shape: it is not that we have simply mislaid the self, but that the self is hidden, in principle, from view. Our search for the self as one object among others in the world is forlorn. So in what can self-discovery consist, given what we now know, that it does not consist in the discovery of a self 'out there'? For the Upaniṣadic sage, self-discovery is the supreme quest and the source of moral and spiritual fulfilment; but they have hidden the self so well as to make their own quest seem hopeless. To the question 'in what does the disclosure of the self consist?' there seem now to be two possible answers. One is to identify a non-objectual mode or aspect of experience, the enjoyment of which is constitutive of self-knowledge. This is the way of the mystic, but need not necessarily lead to mysticism. The other way is the way of the quietist, who will seek to explore the moral and experiential consequences of the discovery that the self is not a possible object of consciousness, without trying to find a substitute for the knowledge that cannot be had (an epistemic humility). Yājñavalkya, again in his conversation with Maitreyī, makes what appears to be a constructive proposal of the first sort:

> It is like this. When a drum is being beaten, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the drum or the man beating that drum. Or when a conch is being blown, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the conch or the man blowing that conch. Or when a lute is being played, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the lute or the man playing that lute.
>
> (BU 2.4.7–9; 4.5.8–10)

The context has made it amply clear that, when it comes to the human subject, what cannot be caught is the self. So the proposal is that, when a

[18] Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 15.

sensation is being sensed, you catch the sensing self only by getting hold of the sensing; when a cognition is being cognized, you catch the thinker only by getting hold of the thinking. Here is a way to reach the self—not by grasping it as an object, but catching it in its activity of sensing and thinking. Just as it is hopeless to catch a sound in the air, so it is impossible to catch the self as if it were a thing. If we cannot catch the sound once it has been released, we can catch it at the moment of its production—catch the producing of the sound. If we cannot catch the self as an object among others in the world, we can catch it in the very act of thinking. This tallies nicely with the Chāndogya description mentioned before (CU 8.12.4–5). My proposal, in other words, is that we read the passage as saying that the self is caught in the phenomenological quality of thinking, in the flavour of the experience of 'what it is like' to think. There is something that it feels like, from within, to be thinking, and in focusing upon this one is participating in a non-objectual awareness of the self. This is something that cannot directly be 'taught', and it is the reason for the oblique literary form assumed by the Upaniṣadic narrative. The very narrative form that the story of Indra assumes, as an allegory of concealment, functions protreptically, to turn the mind of the reader, to redirect their search in a new direction. I will say more about this in chapter 4.

Consider the following passage, again from the second report of Yājñavalkya's conversation with Maitreyī:

> As a mass of salt has no distinctive core and surface; the whole thing is a single mass of flavour—so indeed, my dear, this self has no distinctive core and surface; the whole thing is a compact mass (*ghana*) of cognition (*prajñāna*).
>
> (BU 4.5.13)

In this passage, which parallels BU 2.4.12 quoted above, the use of the metaphor of salt is given a new meaning. The search for the self is not a search for the cognitive *core* of the psyche, but for the *quintessence* that pervades it and can be extracted (*pra-jñāna*). The description of the self as being without a distinctive core and surface tells strongly against the correctness of attributing to the Upaniṣadic thinkers a 'substratum' theory of self.

How exactly *does* it feel to experience the self?

> It is like this [says Yājñavalkya, this time to Janaka]. As a man embraced by a woman he loves is oblivious to everything within or without, so this person

embraced by the self consisting of knowledge is oblivious to everything within or without. Clearly, this is the aspect of his where all desires are fulfilled, where the self is the only desire, and which is free from desires and far from sorrows.

(BU 4.3.21)

Where a man sees, hears, or discerns no other thing—that is plenitude. Where one sees, hears, or discerns some other thing—that is scarcity … . Plenitude, indeed, is below; plenitude is above; plenitude is in the west; plenitude is in the east; plenitude is in the south; and plenitude is in the north. Indeed, plenitude extends over this whole world. Now the substitution of the word 'I'—I am, indeed, below; I am above; I am in the west; I am in the east; I am in the south; I am in the north. Indeed, I extend over this whole world. Next, the substitution of self—The self, indeed, is below; the self is above; the self is in the west; the self is in the east; the self is in the south; and the self is in the north. Indeed, the self extends over this whole world. A man who sees it this way, thinks about it this way, and perceives it this way; a man who finds pleasure in the self, who dallies with the self, who mates with the self, and who attains bliss in the self—he becomes completely his own master; he obtains complete freedom of movement in all the worlds.

(CU 7.5.1–2)

What I am calling an awareness of the 'what it feels like to be thinking' is, the first of these passages says, a non-objectual experience of pure rapture. In the second passage, it is described as an experience that does not represent the subject as having a spatial location. Contrast that with ordinary perceptual experience, whose egocentric frame-of-reference places me in the centre of a network of spatial relationships with the objects perceived. The Upaniṣadic self isn't a self shown but not stated, as it was for Wittgenstein; rather, it is the self that hovers in experience's phenomenal shadow. It is a sense of being present everywhere; or better, a sense of being stripped of a sense of being somewhere.

Even though it is present to each of us, the phenomenal character of thinking itself is barely noticeable, hidden as it is behind the 'false desires' of worldly cognitive involvement. In the cultivated sensibility of the Upaniṣadic sage, however, it is strong and loud, completely satisfying:

Just as a disk smeared with clay, once it is cleaned well, shines brightly, so also an embodied person, once he has perceived the true nature of the self, becomes solitary, his goal attained and free from sorrow.

(SU 2.14)

The self is discovered, then, in the shadowy edges of experience. It is a further step, and one taken only in the more theistic late Upaniṣads, to identify this experience with a mystical awareness of the divine. This is the true nature of self, distinct from the bits and pieces of cognition, which are mere *designations* of the 'knowledge' (*prajñāna*) in which the self consists:

> Which of these is the self? Is it that by which one sees? Or hears? Or smells odours? Or utters speech? Or distinguishes between what is tasty and what is not? Is it the heart and the mind? Is it awareness? Perception? Discernment? Cognition? Wisdom? Insight? Steadfastness? Thought? Reflection? Drive? Memory? Intention? Purpose? Will? Love? But these are various designations of cognition (*prajñānasya nāmadheyāni*) … . Knowledge (*prajñāna*) is the eye of all that, and on knowledge it is founded. Knowledge is the eye of the world, and knowledge, the foundation. *Brahman* is knowing. It is with this self consisting in knowledge that he went up from this world and, having obtained all his desire in the heavenly world up there, became immortal.
>
> (AU 3.1–4)

I will conclude with a final and necessarily tentative conjecture. The discovery of self has a phenomenology, and that phenomenology is the esoteric phenomenology of disclosure itself. The anxiety has been instilled by a constant reiteration of the message that something of great value has been lost, something that makes the difference between immortal freedom and generations in hell. The sheer relief to be had on being told that what was lost is now found, is itself an ecstatic rapture. What is the catalyst for that ecstatic release? Perhaps not even an actual discovery. In her study in the ethics of secrets, Sissela Bok says:

> [a]wareness of the allure and the dangers of secrecy … is central to human experience of what is hidden and set apart. Rooted in encounters with the powerful, the sacred, and the forbidden, this experience goes far deeper than the partaking of any one secret. Efforts to guard secrets, probe them, or share them often aim for this deeper and more pervasive experience. If we do not take this into account … then we shall but skim the surface; and the secrets, once revealed, will seem paltry and out of proportion to all that went into guarding them.[19]

Exactly so here. No actual secret knowledge about the self, no matter how insightful, could by itself explain the enormous reluctance of the Upaniṣadic

[19] Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 5.

sage to speak. That reluctance has another function—to generate a fearsome sense of secrecy, the release from which constitutes an experience of euphoric bliss, and so directs the mind to where it should, all along, have been looking.[20]

[20] A modern example of this literary use of the trope of secrecy and concealment is found in Henry James's story, 'The figure in the carpet'. James describes the secret as the 'bait on a hook' and as the 'cheese in a mousetrap', enthralling yet frustrating the reader, who is thereby forced to reflect on the nature of their quest. Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1986).