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# Córdoban Discourses: A Drama of Interreligious Dialogue\*

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**SETTING:** Córdoba, Spain, 1135 CE, 29th year of the reign of ‘Ali “amir al-muslimin,” second king of the Berber Almoravid dynasty, rulers of Moorish Spain from 1071 to 1147. Córdoba, the capital of Andalus and the center of the Almoravid holdings in Spain, is a bustling cosmopolitan center, a crossroads for Europe and the Middle East, and the meeting-point of three religious traditions. Most significantly, Córdoba at this time is the hub of European intellectual activity. From the square—itsself impressively large and surrounded by a massive colonnade, the regularity and ordered beauty of which typifies the Moorish taste for symmetry (so beloved of M.C. Escher)—can be seen the huge Córdoba mosque, erected in the 8th-century by Khalif Abd-er-Rahman I to the glory of Allah, oft forgiving, most merciful. It is the second largest building in Islam, and the bastion of the still entrenched but soon to fade Muslim presence in western Europe.

**SCENE:** Three figures sit upon stone benches beneath the westernmost colonnade of the Córdoba mosque, involved in an animated, though friendly discussion on matters of faith and reason, knowledge and God, language and logic. The host is none other than Jehudah Halevi,<sup>1</sup> and his esteemed guests Master Peter Abelard<sup>2</sup> and the venerable Rāmānuja,<sup>3</sup> whose obviously advanced age belies his youthful voice, gleaming eye, quick hands, and general exuberance. It is autumn, early evening...

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\* The following text reproduces, to the best of his ability, a recent dream of the author, after an evening of over strenuous persual of sundry medieval texts. It should be noted that any historical or factual errors are entirely the fault of the limitations of retrieval, and in no way reflect upon the veracity of the characters or the truth of the dream itself.

**Jehudah:** Once again, I cannot sufficiently express my sincere pleasure in having two such esteemed guests. Master Abelardus, your taking some time from your busy schedule is much appreciated...

**Abelard:** But my dear ben-Samuel, you must know that my affairs are in a disordered state, as per the usual.<sup>4</sup> My persecutors are relentless, and now I hear that the famed Bernard of Clairvaux has shown interest in defaming me to the Christian world. At any rate, the opportunity to discourse with you again would alone be enough to tear me away from the pesterings of Lombardus<sup>5</sup> and that damnable Brescia,<sup>6</sup> let alone the rare chance to hold forth with the venerable Master Rāmānuja; to drink, if you will, a rare draught from the timeless fount of Indian knowledge and teaching.

**Jehudah:** Young Lombardus no doubt looks upon you as something of a hero, as I am sure do many of the hot-blooded youths of Paris...

**Abelard:** That wretched affair<sup>7</sup> has caused such distraction; I'm sure that even in the most remote hills of India the story of my misfortunes abounds. I wish to speak of it no more. I am sure Rāmānuja, whose own ascetic practice, though freely chosen, unlike my own, was precipitated by the ways of the fairer sex,<sup>8</sup> will oblige. But let us continue our discussion, as pleasant as such digressions can be on such a beautiful autumn eve. I was asking our resident Brahmanist here to explain, if he may, his so-called *viśiṣṭādvaita*; to explicate, in particular, his "qualified non-dualism" vis-à-vis the teachings of his estimable predecessor Śāṅkarācārya. As our (Jehudah and my) Proverbs say: "A wise man by hearing will be wiser, an intelligent man will gain sound guidance" (Prov. 1:5).

**Rāmānuja:** Thank you, Master Abelard, for your kind words, and you dear Ha-Levi, for your hospitality, and the opportunity to speak on divers matters in this great city of learning. My regret, if any, is that we lack a Mohammedan participant in our colloquy.

**Jehudah:** Yes, there are certainly Muslim (as they prefer to be called) scholars abounding here (though none, perhaps, of equal to the late Ibn Sīnā<sup>9</sup>); unfortunately none have been able to make it here this evening, it being Ramaḍān. Perhaps at a later date we will be obliged as such. But there is young Roshd [*gestures towards a young boy reading on a bench nearby*]. Though but a boy of nine, he is said to be quite an adept in such matters as we have been speaking.<sup>10</sup> I shall call him over.

## Unity in D(e)i(vers)ity

**Rāmānuja:** But as to your enquiry, Peter. We “objectors” (*pūrvapakṣins*) to the *advaitan* philosophy of Śrī Śaṅkara cannot fully accept the idea of an eternal, absolutely non-changing consciousness—whose nature is pure non-differenced intelligence, free from all distinction whatever—as the *Brahman*, the Supreme Lord, similar perhaps to your own European image of God, particularly, as I understand it, coming out of the Greek tradition. For just as your God of Abraham maintains contact with the world, so for us *viśiṣṭādvaitin* the reality of immanence involves the manifestation of Brahman, the *ensoulment*, if you will, of the world and of individual souls by Brahman. This is the basis for our core concern with the reality of “plurality” and difference, based on linguistic evidence and empirical knowledge (*Vedānta* I.i.1).

**Abelard:** So that your Brahman partakes in “contingency”?

**Rāmānuja:** For Śaṅkara, the One is *nirguṇa*, that is, without qualities or attributes; its seeming manifestations in the world are in fact illusory. We objectors dispute this vision of the Supreme, for such a quality-less God is unthinkable, as is anything “attribute-less.” Besides, is it not the relation of Brahman to *jīvas* (souls) and *prakṛtiti* (materiality) which reveals the Glory and all-pervading aspects of the One? The disciples of Śaṅkara, as I am sure happens in your own faiths,<sup>11</sup> have moved away, we feel, from devotion, or *bhakti*, to a too-limited focus on theoretical knowledge and cognition, as if these, without grace, could bring salvation.

**Jehudah:** But of plurality? You were about to say...

**Rāmānuja:** Yes, forgive me. We do not believe in a “pure consciousness.” Consciousness must be *of* something, after all; this seems too obvious a point to belabour. Many arguments have I propounded, in my commentaries, to show that though Brahman is the source and cause of all things, this need not entail non-differentiation. Suchwise is our belief more aptly known as the “non-dualism of the qualified.” What are qualified are One, what qualifies is Many. When the Upaniṣads, to which as *Uttaravedānta* we attach great importance (being, in some ways, our New Testament...forgive me Master Halevi, our “Second Testament”); as I say when the Upaniṣads identify Brahman and the world, they denote not non-differentiation but rather “inseparability,” what in my language we call *aprthaksiddhi*. In other words,

though Brahman is of course the All, the One—in relation to the souls (*cit*) and the world (*acit*); as *Saguna*-Brahman, or *Īśvara*—Brahman’s unity is filled with diversity. As the Supreme Lord Brahman has six qualities: *jñāna* (knowledge); *bala* (strength); *aiśvarya* (sovereignty); *vīrya* (heroism); *śakti* (power); and *tejas* (splendour).

**Young Averroës:** Thus, if I understand you, a tripartite division of the cosmos, something akin perhaps to the Christians’ heretical tritheism?

**Rāmānuja:** [*laughs*] Well, no, not precisely, though I should defer to Master Peter for a response to that remark. Remember that, although we assign eternity to “God,” the selves and the world, they are not on the same footing, the latter two being necessarily dependent upon the former; the *jīvas* and the world make up the body of Brahman, who, like your own Allah, is all-powerful.

**Abelard:** Young Roshd and I will discuss my heresies later; God knows, he is not the first, nor probably is he the last to accuse me of such... Would you say, Rāmānuja, that your doctrine could be put thus: Reality is not some sort of *synthesis*, nor is it *illusion*, but rather is exhausted by but does not exhaust Brahman?

**Rāmānuja:** Very good, yes. In the case of the blue lotus, for example, the attribute of “blueness” is, you must admit, *distinct* in some fashion, from the substance “lotus”—distinct but yet inseparable. In fact the “blueness” of the lotus depends upon the “lotus” for existence, though not vice versa.

**Abelard:** Indeed. Brahman qualified by the universe and *jīvas* is One.

**Rāmānuja:** Yes. The universe, the plurality of souls are distinct but inseparable from Brahman.

**Abelard:** I have suggested, in my ill-used treatise on the Christian Trinity,<sup>12</sup> that, by way of analogy, the Godhead is similar to a piece of brass, from which is self-begotten the seal, from which proceeds the act of sealing. Thus, in Christian terms: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But of course, in my recognition of the plurality of religious faiths,<sup>13</sup> I have suggested ulterior “names” for these aspects of divinity: Power, Wisdom and Love.<sup>14</sup>

**Jehudah:** This is interesting to me. But I have an objection to make: it seems to me that either, on the one and, this diversity of persons must consist in the names only, and not in actuality, so that only the names are different, and there is no real diversity in God Himself. Either this must be the case, or else the diversity is in actuality (*in re*, as you may say in your Latin tongue) and not in names. Or, failing this supposition, then it must be both in actuality and also in the names. If it were possible, however, for one of the names to be taken away the total meaning of the Trinity would be lost and, if we consider the names only, there is no eternal Trinity or persons to whom names can be given by men (see *Theo.* 1237A).

**Young Averroës:** Assuredly Halevi is right; and, moreover, how can there be three persons where it is evident that there are not three things? Why, indeed, speak of “three” in such a case? There is not even a multiplicity. How can a thing be multiple if it has no multiple within it? There must be parts to make any kind of multiplicity. Yet you have said that there are no parts in your so-called Trinity.

**Abelard:** Perhaps...

**Young Averroës:** Wait, let me finish sir, if you please. Since God is substance and this name God refers to substance, not to a person, we may just as well speak of a threefold God or a threefold substance or, for that matter, of a threefold Father (all praise to Allah!). For what does a threefold God or threefold substance mean but three Gods or three substances? Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous!<sup>15</sup>

**Abelard:** Well indeed, a Muslim scholar we *do* have with us! Perhaps I will let my colleague Rāmānuja answer this one, for, though it pertains to my vision of the Trinity, it also puts into question the unity-in-diversity of which you have spoken. For the central problem here, it seems to me, is that we have no adequate philosophical forms of thought to clarify this idea, which seems to confound reason, and perhaps even faith, faith in a Supreme Lord (cf. *Theo.* 1241B). As such, the wisdom of India may help us to come through this muddle and into a clearer light...

**Rāmānuja:** Very well, let me see. Perhaps I should relate my interpretation of the famous Upaniṣadic statement *Tat tvam asi*, or “Thou art that!” (*Ch.* VI.12–14) For Śāṅkara this merely restates the Unity of Brahman, it functions thus as a tautology of sorts; but we view it quite

differently. From another text which reads “Having entered with this individual self, let me proliferate name and form,” (*Ch. Up.* VI.II.3) we learn that, since the ensouling self is ensouled by Brahman, Brahman is referred to by the names of the ensouling self. Thus it is Brahman who is expressed by the two words “that” and “you,” applied in a way that might be called “correlative predication”—the word “that” declares him who is the cause of the world, the source of every noble quality, without change, while “thou” declares that very Brahman qualified by the *mode* that is one’s body insofar as Brahman is the inner Controller of the individual self. In short, one can say that the two words “that” and “thou” are applied to one and the same Brahman in respect of a difference of grounds in him for the application. Perhaps I should sum up this way: from the viewpoint of the qualifying mode (mode-possessor relationship) identity-in-difference can be proclaimed; while from the causal-Brahman-effected-Brahman point of view, *identity*-in-difference is stressed (see Lipner 1986, 46–47). God is the sole Immanent ground of Reality of all this evolved and evolving world, pervading all that is concretely Real down to the blade of grass; the effulgence that illuminates the universe (*Vedānta* 6). *Isāvāsyāam idaṃ sarvaṃ* (“By the Lord is all pervaded”; *Isa Up.* 8).

**Jehudah:** We must be wary, all of us, of pantheism. I must object to the temptation, particularly prevalent among philosophers of our age, to place Nature on a par with God... (*Kuz.* I.76)

**Rāmānuja:** “Ah, now: While His is *the Essence*, He ‘essentializes’ and develops.”<sup>16</sup> That is, we must remember that Brahman is not *exhausted* by the universe and souls, though He *exhausts them*. Says our *Isa Upaniṣad*: “Into deep darkness fall those who follow the immanent. Into deeper darkness fall those who follow the transcendent” (*Isa Up.* 9). Not pantheism, surely, though perhaps “panentheism”—God *is* all, and is *in* all, while not being exhausted by all (see Hartshorne 1987).

**Abelard:** And to think that I once thought of myself, in my pride, as the only philosopher in the world! (*Story* 65)

*Tertium Via*: Conceptualism

**Abelard:** Some sort of *tertium quid*, or *tertium via*, is here presented I think, staying the balance between the pitfalls of what we in the Western tradition might call “idealism” (or Platonism, rationalism), which loses sight of the magnificence of God’s creation, and the glory of everyday human existence, and “nominalism” (or Aristotelianism, empiricism), which, in sticking too closely to empirical reality, comes in danger of losing God and the spiritual realm altogether.<sup>17</sup> If so, then we really have crossed a Rubicon in our thinking, before even meeting; for I have been working on what can be called “conceptualism,” a linguistically-based epistemological framework in which to reconcile the dualities we are facing, not just in terms of God and the world, but in everyday language, with respect to identity, differentiation, universalism and pluralism. In such, “universals” are neither “realities” in the traditional sense, nor mere names, but the concepts formed by the intellect when abstracting the similarities between perceived and individual things; while not “real” in and of themselves, they have a linguistic and intellectual reality that derives their *participation in particulars*. Thus we *know* the universal only *through* the particular instantiation of such, and we *perceive* the particular *in* the universal. In short, the universal is considered to be the one characteristic which enters into particular things and through which they are known. The variety of things bespeaks differing degrees of particularity, it is a matter of differing forms of the universal. The logic of the Platonists (and perhaps the *advaitins*), only succeeds in showing how there can be diversity understood by the mind, it goes nowhere towards revealing how there can be particular things in the world as perceived. For the act of thought and the process of perceiving must be distinguished from their objects (see McCallum 1948, 41–42).

**Rāmānuja:** Yes! For neither “mere Being” nor “consciousness” alone constitutes reality; there is a distinction between consciousness and its objects, which rests on the relation of “object” and “that for which the object is”; Being and consciousness are not one (*Vedānta* I.i.1). In answer to the earlier remark made about “substances,” let me suggest that “substance” be conceived as “that which has a mode,” a subject-in-relation, perhaps, a “that” which involves, necessitates even, a “thou,” in order to fulfill its “thatness.” Let me explain in terms familiar to Indian thought, before I make more general statements, and allow Master Abelard to respond, as well as you Master Halevi, who have been silent, but who I know has much to add here. There are six sub-



stances in *viśiṣṭādvaita*, but three eternalities, which are Brahman (here I will say “God,” to ease communication, though wary of the differences) and God’s body, as *jīvas* (souls) and *prakṛti* (nature, the world). Like the individual soul, God is the essence of intelligence, self-revealing, and knows objects through *dharma-bhūta-jñāna*; but God is free from all defects and is possessed of all auspicious qualities. God is also all-merciful, young Master Roshd, and salvation only comes through his grace, complete submission (*‘islam*) to which we call in our language *prapatti*. God is both material and efficient cause of the universe: as cause, he has as his body the souls and matter in their unmanifest form; as effect, he has them in their manifest and diversified form. *Prakṛti*, the physical world, evolves in its infinite variety under the guidance of God. The material cause is not the “substance” as such (“clay”), but as characterized by a mode (“lump”), and the effect is the same substance as characterized by another mode (“pot”). In short, what are “qualities” in other systems are “modalities” in *viśiṣṭādvaita*. In terms of causation, *reality* is the cause; *reality in different modes* is the effect. All change is modal change.

**Abelard:** The religion of the Christian faith asserts and believes in one God as three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God, not a plurality of Gods: one Creator of things visible and invisible, one first principle, one goodness, one disposer and Lord of all things; one eternal, one omnipotent, one immeasurable; and withal affirms a single identity of unity...*except*, and this is the key to my stance, *except* as pertains to the (necessarily) discrete attributes of the three persons. Plurality, multiplicity, diversity are professed only in regard to the persons. In everything else unity is maintained (*Theo.* 1229B, C).

**Jehudah:** You sound as though you are back as Soissons, good Peter; you need not apologize for the admission of diversity; we all seek to learn here, not to judge.<sup>18</sup> But now I shall put in my own word; as you say, I have been quiet, letting these thoughts be spoken, so that I could formulate my own perspective more thoroughly. In my view, the attributes, or names given to God, are many, although His essence, as you say, is only one. The variety arises from the variety of places where God’s essence dwells, just as the rays of the Sun are many whilst the Sun is everywhere the same. Our human sense, after all, can only perceive the attributes of things, not the substrata themselves. It is not these to which we must render homage. One sees a prince, for instance, in war in one habit, in his city in another, in his house in a third—all different modes or states of being, yet one can see, following one’s

judgement rather than one's perception, that he is a prince at all times! With respect to *the* Great Prince, though his appearance, manner, disposition and qualities may change, still we consider him to be the same and the Prince, or King, or Lord, *because he has spoken to thee and given thee his commands* (Kuz. IV.3).

### *Theologia: Language, Speech, Scripture*

**Rāmānuja:** I am glad you have spoken thus, dear Jehudah, for you bring in the linguistic element which I think serves as a bridge of sorts between the doctrines we are all propounding here, whatever may be our theological differences. For it is speech (*śabda*) which proves difference. Speech possesses the power of denoting only such things as are affected with difference. For the plurality of words is based on a plurality of meanings; the sentence, therefore, which is an aggregate of words, expresses some special combination of things (meanings of words), and hence has no power to denote a thing devoid of all difference (*Vedānta* I.i.1). All terms whatsoever denote Brahman insofar as distinguished by the different things which we associate with those terms on the basis of everyday speech and etymology. But there is even more to language than this. Vedic language, *all* language actually, is, *pace* the *Prabhākara* position, “fact-assertive,” but this need not deny the prescriptive element that you, Halevi, have just exposed. Vedic words have an innate denotative power demanding fruition in the ultimate production of real things, but they do not “terminate” in natural objects, which are only, one might say, a “first order stopping-place.” The *śruti* terminate referentially in Brahman, the very ground of all Being. In an exegetical analysis of the mystical syllable OM (found in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*), I have tried to develop the structural correspondence between language and reality (see Lipner 1986, 21–22). Language is not an entity apart from the Supreme.

**Jehudah:** In my writings have I also pursued this line, in keeping with a long tradition within Judaism, particularly the Kabbalistic tradition, which, as you may know, places much emphasis on the close tie, or even the coequality of God and the divine language (in the Tetragrammaton)—the voice of the words of the living God which produced the form of the things spoken. YHWH speaks, and things come into existence.

**Abelard:** Yes, Jehudah, and we have had occasion to speak of this before. I want to return, however, to several points in the long and in-

formative discourse just given to us by our *viśiṣṭādvaitin* friend. First, with regard to your comment on the modality of change, I would like to note that, in so-called “modal” propositions, normal (predicate) logic does not apply; normal logical analysis is shut down.<sup>19</sup> Modals hearken to a logic which is something more than the predicate logic we have come to assume as the only form of logic; perhaps, with modals, we are driven to re-examine the linguistic element of logic, the “word” of *logos*. In my work I have sought to rigorously apply the rules of logic to all fields of thought; but I do not of course attempt to apply the rather limited formal logic of which we are familiar; for I am concerned, largely, with how we *express* concepts and words and how we *understand* or *give meaning*. Now, I would like to ask our guest to explain, if he might, the “correlative predication” to which he referred; I am afraid I am somewhat unclear on this.

**Rāmānuja:** Certainly, Peter. I have used the rather awkward term “correlative” or “co-ordinate predication” to translate the Sanskrit’s *samānādhikaraṇya*. In a co-ordinate predication the identical import of terms taken in their natural signification should be brought out. This fits, I think, with the modal logic we have been speaking of. Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* defines co-ordinate predication as “the signification of an identical entity by several terms which are applied to that entity on different grounds” (see Adidevananda 1968).

**Abelard:** In other words, accidental or adjectival predication does not imply separate identity. I may say that a man is a good lute player; I do not therefore say that he is a good man (*Theo.* 1263B).

**Rāmānuja:** Exactly. This is in accordance with the general principle that co-ordination is meant to express one thing subsisting in a twofold form.<sup>20</sup> Thus Identity-in-Difference: in such a proposition the attributes not only should be distinct from each other but also different from the substance, though *inseparable* from it. Co-ordinate predication implies differentiation not only *between* individual objects but also *within* the object. *Śarīra-śarīri-bhava:* thus in Brahman as in the purple lotus...

**Jehudah:** *Blue. Blue* lotus, my friend.

**Rāmānuja:** Yes, of course, *blue* lotus, forgive me.

**Jehudah:** No apologies needed; I thought to call on you there as a joke of sorts, for I am in such agreement with you that, in order for this to

be a true disputation, I thought... But I was going to point out, in our flirting with questions of language and speech, my impression and opinion that it is speech—oral communication—which must be given priority over the written word. Written texts can certainly prompt and give knowledge, but true devotion is a conversational activity, a listening and speaking. In more general terms, it is the faculty of speech which transmits the idea of the speaker into the soul of the hearer; as the Proverb says (not “reads,” for it is a living word—in God, *S’far*, divine calculation, *Sippur*, and writing, *Sefer*, are a unity)<sup>21</sup>: “From the mouths of scholars, but not from the mouths of books” (*Kuz.* II.72). Experience, assuredly, must be the starting point for thought.<sup>22</sup>

**Abelard:** I agree. I have used, as a term denoting this “logic above logic,” this “speech above speech,” this “over-knowledge”—the ancient word *theologia*.<sup>23</sup> Religion and philosophy have the same fundamental purpose: an understanding of life and reality. Theology subsumes these, drawing them into concert; it involves not only logic, in the fullest sense, but also physic and metaphysic, and for myself is centered around a critical approach to the meaning of words and concepts as the basis of knowing—this being a bridge of sorts to further our “understanding” of divinity and the world. For to get understanding we should employ every available means.<sup>24</sup>

**Rāmānuja:** Right. “Unutil *divya-sthāna*<sup>25</sup> over land flees, our ‘theology’ topples opponents.”<sup>26</sup> I as well believe that texts other than our Vedas should be used in our studies and our devotion: hymns of the saints, Purāṇas, Tamil literature, Agana literature—all these can be helpful and illuminatory, as addendum to the *śruti* and *smṛti*.

**Young Averroës:** But what does all this presage in terms of your respective readings of the Divine Word—Holy Scripture?

**Abelard:** Good question, Roshd. My *Sic et Non* is a work of *disputatio*—a tool for the sharpening of the wits rather than a systematic exposition of nature or God. “Contradiction” within scriptural passages are neither to be glossed over, denied, nor admitted as “contradictions” which refute the corpus *in toto*. Rather, these must be set forth, in order that we may see the modes and relations involved, so that we may approach the texts with a more wary eye and an ear for nuance and subtlety. For, bearing in mind our foolishness we believe that our spontaneous understanding is defective, *not* the divine record; but our achievement of full understanding is impeded especially by unusual

modes of expression and by different significances that can be attached to one and the same word, as a word is used now in one sense, now in another (*Sic et Non*, quoted in Tierney 1983, 173).

**Rāmānuja:** Aha! Scripture is, in a strong sense, not derivative but originative—it is not a mere statement (*anuvāda*) about something “other.” Scripture *speaks, shows* divinity (*Vedānta* I.i.1). But in *advaita*, the empirical evacuation of terms to the point of signifying absolute non-differentiation destroys the very fabric of language as we know it and by implication nullifies the very *raison d’être* of the Scripture (Lipner 1986, 28). I have conceived of a method of grasping seemingly contradictory scriptural passages by pointing to the different emphases, or the different grounds upon which these attributes are applied. These are, briefly: (1) *analytical* texts—which declare difference between world, self, and Brahman by virtue of “world” in this case being the non-sentient matter which is the object of experience; (2) *mediating* texts—in which Brahman is the inner self of all entities that constitute His body, and where *jīvas* and *prakṛti* are particular modes of Brahman; (3) *synthetic* texts—such as the *Tattvamasi*, where the unity of Brahman, in causal and affected aspect, is maintained, and where souls and matter are nothing more than modes of Brahman; here is the aspect of dependent existence, and the transcendence of Brahman, stressed.

**Jehudah:** It is remarkable, Rāmānuja, but I too, in my *Kuzari*, have put forth a tripartite schema for dealing with attribution in terms of names for God, which resembles yours: (1) *relative* attributes (such as “blessed, praised, holy”)—which distinguish God, borrowed as their are from the devotional stance; but which, though numerous, do not connote a full plurality or absolute transcendence, they do not affect his Unity; (2) *creative* attributes—which are derived from acts emanating from Him by ways of the natural medium, thus names of God which are expressed in recognition of his eternally creative and life-giving capacity; (3) *negative* attributes—attributes which are given not as true names but rather to negate the possibility of their contraries being attributes of God; ultimately, of course, God is above these referents...

**Rāmānuja:** Indeed! I have suggested that those (Vedic) texts which deny “plurality,” actually deny that plurality-which-contradicts-the-Unity of Brahman, who has no competitors (*Vedānta* I.i.1). These do not, however, deny that plurality on Brahman’s part which depends on its intention to become manifold—a plurality proved by the text “May I be many, may I grow forth” (*Ch. Up.* V.3.3). For “Immanence” is not

the “non-transcendent” or “finite,” but is the *presence of the infinite in the finite*—establishing the latter in existence and continually imparting to it the *power to be* (Rhadgavachar 1972).

**Jehudah:** In the last instance, “One” is used to negate plurality, in the sense of there being ulterior or separate essences, but does not thereby imply Unity as usually conceived, for instance, by the *advaitins* or our own Neoplatonists, at times—a “Godhead” which is All, but without qualities.

**Abelard:** We are reaching a consensus, it seems, with regard to the importance of language, beyond the merely “grammatical” or “syntactic-semantic” realm; language and language-use have ontological implications, and thus, it would seem, implications on divinity.

#### *Bhakti*: Devotion, Atonement, Liberation

**Jehudah:** Yes, good Peter. But let us be wary; as we before strayed close to pantheism, let us not emphasize *rhetoric* over all else, and allow the cadres of dialecticians who populate our respective realms to claim us as ones of their own; let us not become “sophists,” like the *Mutukuliman*.<sup>27</sup> For,

Wisdom is withered that abode in state  
In hearts exceeding wise  
For all they thought and did devise  
Is other than he knoweth...<sup>28</sup>

**Rāmānuja:** Quite right! For all my attempts to bring the utterly transcendent Brahman of the *advaitins* “down to earth,” I do so not to humanize God so much as to render more proper our submission and devotion to his word. For, as my great teacher Śrī Yamunācārya taught, after the twofold training of the mind in *karma-yoga* (performance of those duties fit to one’s station in life, selflessly, *niṣkāmyakarmayoga*, as per the Gīta), and *jñāna-yoga* (meditation upon the self as distinct from body, mind, from which comes “self-knowledge”), *bhakti-yoga* is the third and ultimate stage. But first, let me add, “self-knowledge” here is nothing other than the realization of one’s dependence on Brahman. As one disassociates one’s “self” from the world or “nature,” one sees one’s association yet distinction from “God.” Against Śāṅkara, the crypto-Buddhist, *dissolution* of Self into Brahman is not “liberation,” but rather an *understanding* of true Self (*ātman*). Thus, it is a destruc-

tion not of the *ego* so much as of *egoity*—and thus presages a new attitude or disposition towards works and faith. As it has been said: “Lest ultimate truths hie Endymion’s route,<sup>29</sup> may *atman* reveal the I-*Nārāyāna*”—the Brahman-filled and Brahman-dependent Self.<sup>30</sup> As to *bhakti*, it is the pinnacle of the life process, though not the “end,” for it is a stage lasting the rest of one’s life. *Bhakti* we *pūrvapakṣins* use in a rather distinctive way; it does not connote the popular sense in which it is understood. When the meditation of *jñāna* attains the form of what might be called “firm remembrance” (*dhruvānusmṛtiḥ*), characterized by intense love, the vision of the Supreme is attained. But note that I say not “union” with God, rather a vision that is in some sense union, by its intensity. This is “God-knowledge,” the *vidya* or *upāsana* spoken of in the *śrutis*.<sup>31</sup> In short, ordinary knowledge, though not to be disdained, is not sufficient for “salvation” or “liberation,” which comes through *bhakti*, a certain, perhaps “higher knowledge” through which God can be “seen.” Thus the Song of the Blessed: “I am attainable only through undivided *bhakti*” (*Gīta* XI.54).

**Jehudah:** In my view there exists a separate “faculty,” higher than understanding, where “communion” with God is achieved (*ha-inyan, ha-elohi*)—this indicates both sides of the relation: objectively, from God alone; subjectively, in language and logic, from our power to apprehend. Though in one sense we must be silent before Him, we are importuned to “listen” to

the works His hand hath wrought  
Let them declare; and may lips o’erbrim  
With singing and their voice be loud with praises fraught.  
Tongues fulfilled of speech,  
Exalting, crowning, telling o’er His praise;  
Souls be extolling, still discerning ways,  
To learn and tell and teach...<sup>32</sup>

**Abelard:** God is more than the world He created, certainly. Though, according to our faith and clear reason, wherever a faithful soul may be, there it finds God, since he is present everywhere; “beatitude” we receive from the vision of God which he infuses into us and which we do not apprehend by our own power. We certainly do not mount up words to apprehend the brightness of the material sun, but it sheds its light on us for us to enjoy. Likewise, it is not so much that we approach God as that He approaches us, shining his brightness on us and the heat of his love from above...sorry? Yes perhaps we could say *ta-*

*pas...* (*Dial.* 139–40). As you, Halevi, have just expressed in your lovely poem, we can, with some adequacy, speak and describe God’s creation, or perhaps, as we panentheists might say, God-in-creation, or Brahman-as-qualified by the world and souls; but we can never reach Brahman as the source and sustainer of creation and existence. For as the Evangelist tells us “The one who is of the earth speaks on an earthly plane” (Jn. 3:31). In speaking of these things we use, at best, similes and parables, as did Our (excuse me) *My* Lord Jesus Christ. For us Christians the work of Christ is one of illuminating wisdom and our incitement to responsive love in human conduct (*Theo.* I.4).

**Jehudah:** These are saintly words which are more than philosophic; indeed, they deserve the name of wisdom, not philosophy.<sup>33</sup> But we come full circle, for it seems we are back to discussing “attributes,” which, as I think we all agree, have neither direct correlation to substance, nor are they merely signs which point to essences. They are symbols, concepts from which substance, universality, can be glimpsed. But only imperfectly, if without the infusion of grace through devotion. For none applies a distinct name for God except he who hears His address, command, prohibition, approval for obedience and reproof for disobedience (*Kuz.* IV.3). But here is Rabbi Maimon. [*a man approaches from the other side of the square, hurriedly, about to burst with excitement*] My dear Rabbi, what ails ye?

**Rabbi Maimon:** Dearest Jehudah...I have a son, he has just been birthed...we have called him Mosheh<sup>34</sup>...praise to YHWH...greetings sirs...but I must return... [*leaves*]

**Jehudah:** Indeed, a scholar has been born to the world; for in Córdoba’s light the son of the learned Maimon cannot help but become a sage. We only hope he shall be a man of faith, as well, seeking knowledge and concord, in the spirit of our present colloquy, ever-mindful of the Supreme.



## Conclusions

**Jehudah:** In short, what is key is the spirit in which we offer devotion, and in which we acquire and search for knowledge, and in which we do our duties (selflessly, as per your Gīta and our Scriptures). Fear, love and joy are equally valid “approaches” to God. Just as prayers demand devotion, so also is a pious mind necessary to find pleasure in God’s command and law... (*Kuz. II.50*) Knowledge and philosophy are well suited to, and must grow out of, an active life of belief.

**Abelard:** *Credo nos in fluctu eodem esse.*<sup>35</sup> For myself, I do not wish to be a philosopher if it means conflicting with Saint Paul, nor to be an Aristotle if it cuts me off from Christ (*Conf. 270*). One must give way neither entirely to authority nor to shallow cleverness in argument. Yet in order to come to reconciliation, we must talk of these things, rooting out both the unity and diversity of our “ways.” For “worlds can be different although they contain exactly the same things.”<sup>36</sup> God considereth not action, but the spirit of the action. It is the intention, not the deed, wherein the merit or praise of the doer consists (*Eth.*).

**Rāmānuja:** Certainly, we should not assume a Unity in our own thoughts, though they show remarkable congruence, or perhaps, to use a more adequate term, “confluence,” given their different sources, our various backgrounds and unsaid assumptions. Rather, let us see the Unity in our own Diversity, the modal and situational variegations which, though ancillary to the substance of our speech—the possible agreement of our ideas in the Supreme—are nonetheless very real and undeniable, and must not be washed away as floodbanks in the spring, merely for the sake of dialogue and communion. For speech, as critical and formative (even divine) as it may be, can only build the bridge over which we must cross; the crossing itself is another matter. What is certain is that, if we began today’s discussion under the sign of Aryaman, in Vedic literature the god of formal hospitality, we have ended it under Mitra’s protection, the god of intimate friendship among one’s own kind.

**Jehudah:** It grows late, and Master Rāmānuja must leave us tomorrow in the early hours. A word before we break this enjoyable and informative gathering of three worlds (four, before young Roshd was called away by his doting mother). Let me offer a prayer of sorts, to which I think we would all adhere, in summation of these Córdoba dis-

courses: “So maketh He man’s eyes luminous to look upon the Light” (*Poems* 173).

**Rāmānuja:** And I would add, if I may, a prayer of my own tongue, which strikes a similar chord:

TAT SAVITUR VARENIAM  
BHARGO DEVASYA DHIMAHĪ  
DHIYO YO NAH PRACODAYAT.<sup>37</sup>

### Endnotes

1. J(eh)udah Halevi (or ben-Samuel, Arabic name Abu’l-Hasan), foremost Hebrew poet of the Middle Ages, and author of the philosophical-theological dialogue *The Kuzari* (*Kitab Al Khazari*, 1130–40, thus in progress in 1135), which purports to expound the principles of the three Abrahamic faiths as well as Aristotelian philosophy; born c. 1086 C.E., thus aged 48–49 at the time of the present colloquy.
2. Peter Abelard (or Pierre Bailard), Christian philosopher-theologian, the first “scholastic,” and a proto-humanist; born 1079 C.E., thus about 55 or 56 at this time. J. Ramsey McCallum: “The ancient philosophers, their Roman and medieval successors, the prophets and seers of Israel, the Scriptures, and the Christian Fathers, all these he introduced to one another and found in their speech a common note” (McCallum 1948, v).
3. Śrī Rāmānujācārya (herein Rāmānuja), Indian sage and founder of the school known as *Viśiṣṭādvaitavedānta*; date of birth is disputed, said to be c. 1017 C.E., thus making him a venerable 117–18 here, at any rate within several years of his reputed death in 1137 C.E. Rāmānuja travelled much in his extended life, conversing and disputing with other theists, and was in exile in his later years, a period that included contact with the Muslim king at Delhi, who no doubt had friends and relations in the Moorish capital...
4. Apart from the fact that John of Salisbury heard him lecture in Paris in 1136, nothing is known of the whereabouts of Abelard from his quitting the abbey at St. Gildas in the early 1130s to the late years of that decade, when he returned to the limelight in his confrontation with Bernard of Clairvaux (Radice 1974, 34–35). Wherever he was, he completed in these years *Sic et Non*, *Ethica*, and the *Dialogue of a philosopher with a jew and a christian*, and seemed to have gained renewed spirit. The *Dialogue*, whose date has been disputed, but seems to be placeable in this period, led Pierre J. Payer to comment on the close parallel between such and *The Kuzari* of Halevi, Abelard’s contemporary: “There is a surface similarity between the two which is quite striking...However, I know of no possible contact nor a common source which

might explain what seems to be a coincidental parallel” (Payer 1979, 10). Where was he during these years? We know that around 1130, in despair of persecution, Abelard thought seriously of “quitting the realm of Christendom and going over to the heathen (i.e., Saracens, Moors?), there to live a quiet Christian life...” (*Story* 94). Hmm...

5. Peter Lombard (1100–64), a pupil of Abelard in Paris, wrote his famous *Sentences*, a seminal theological text up to Luther’s day, using his master’s dialectical treatise *Sic et Non*.

6. Arnold of Brescia (or Arnaldo da Brescia, 1100–55), Italian religious and political reformer and agitator, one time student of Abelard, he was eventually condemned by St. Bernard, executed and his body burned. Abelard is unconsciously prophetic, for Brescia was “damnable” indeed.

7. Abelard refers to the “Story of His Calamities” (*Historica calamitatum*, as he titled his autobiographical “apology”); the relation, in large part, of his affair with Héloïse, which came to a brutal end at the hands of her enraged uncle Canon Fulbert, whose thugs unmanned the scholar, sending both he and her into holy orders, and thereby making of Abelard and Héloïse hero-figures for romantics throughout the ages.

8. Abelard refers to Rāmānuja’s fight and break with his wife, who placed caste-differences over hospitality and devotion.

9. Ibn Sina (or Avicenna, 980–1037), Arabian philosopher and physician; like Halevi, and many Muslim and Jewish thinkers of the time, master of these two realms.

10. Ibn Roshd (or Averroës, 1126–98), was of course to become the greatest of Moorish thinkers; he is most particularly known for his commentaries on Aristotle, many of whose writings were lost to the Latin West until resurrected in the 12th and 13th centuries through retranslation from the writings of Arabic scholars.

11. In fact, what Rāmānuja speaks of is to occur over the next few centuries, and will eventually contribute to the great schism of the Reformation in Christianity; viz. the scholastic disciples of Anselm, Abelard, and Aquinas lose their focus, forgetting the point of their dialectics and the aim of their knowledge—God. In some sense, Rāmānuja is the Martin Luther of Vedānta, calling for a return to faith and grace over mere “works” and abstruse metaphysical quibbling (see note 30).

12. Abelard refers to his *De unitate et trinitate divina* (Of Unity and the Holy Trinity), written about 1120 and later reworked as the first section of his *Theologia*. Both works were the subject of much controversy; the former was condemned, and Abelard called to a Synod at Soissons (1121) where, devoid of a defense, he was importuned to burn the book with his own hands. In *De uni-*

*tate* he explains the nature of the Christian Trinity by logic, reason, and analogies like that above.

13. He writes to his son Astrolabe: “Tut fidei sectis divisus mundus habetur...” (“The world is divided into so many religious schools of thought...” (*Dial.* 20 n. 3). And Abelard does not have in mind solely the Abrahamic faiths, alluding in his *Theologia* to Indian philosophy, however misinformed he was in this regard (I.1164). McCallum notes that “(t)his reference to the Brahmans indicates the range of Abelard’s philosophy in contrast to medieval limits” (1948, 56–57 n. 3).

14. Cf. Augustine’s distinction within the Godhead of *ingenitas*, *genitas*, *procedens*.

15. Much of the young Muslim’s argument is taken, again, from Abelard’s *Theologia* (1237D, 1238A). The last line comes from the Qur’an, Surah 19:89, a condemnation of the blasphemy of the Christians in imputing to God the begetting of a Son!

16. Strangely, this sentence of Rāmānuja makes an anagram which spells “A.N. Whitehead.” Whitehead (1861–1947) is of course the twentieth-century British logician, philosopher, and father of “process theology,” who seems to hold a very similar conception of the divine to Rāmānuja, and who could probably be called, with some justice, a “panentheist.” The Process God’s nature is “the composite nature of all the actualities of the world, each having obtained its unique representation in the divine nature” (Mellert 1975, 47). See Whitehead 1978, esp. parts I and V.

17. Abelard studied under the famed Platonist (“realist”) William of Champeaux (c.1070–1121), as well as the arch-nominalist (and for this, ill-fated) Jean Roscelin of Campeigne (Roscellinus, c.1050–c.1120), thus imbibing both the still-dominant idealism and the emergent upstart challenge of nominalism.

18. Abelard echoes this sentiment in his *Dialogue*: “I...more desirous of learning than of judging...” (*Dial.* 71).

19. “At vero, cum de sensu propositionis exponuntur, proprie modales non sunt, nec universales vel particulares vel indefinite vel singulares, nec ideo simplicium conversiones retinent...” (Tweedale 1976, 256).

20. *Vedānta* I.i.1. Lipner: “[T]he correlatively predicated expression indicates that a particular thing (the referent) is the basis of a co-presence of more than one determination such that it gives grounds for the predication of several non-synonymous terms in respect of it” (1986, 29).

21. *Kuz.* IV.25. Halevi borrows this mystical cosmogony from the pseudepigraphal *Book of Creation*.

22. Halevi has been considered a precursor of modern existentialist religious

philosophers such as Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), the latter of whom saw the medieval poet as a forerunner and muse of his own philosophic method of *Sprachdenken* (speech-thinking). See Galli 1994.

23. Abelard’s use of “theology” as the title of his last work was controversial (Bernard called it “brazen”), for this term retained its original sense of what we might today call “classical mythology”; that is, storytelling about the gods of the Greco-Roman pantheon. Abelard brought the term into acceptability, though his own use may have retained some of its ancient meaning, as something “other than” pure philosophical talk about God...

24. *Theol.* 1215B. Thus Abelard’s “humanism” long before the Renaissance. Another of his pupils, William of Conches, was instrumental in developing the plea for more inclusive study, of literature and the classics, in “theology.”

25. *Divya-sthana* is God’s celestial abode; thus the meaning of the first part of this epithet is a strong evocation of “never,” for God’s heavenly “home” can never “fly over land” (see Carman 1974, 168).

26. Once again, Rāmānuja prophesyses through anagram, this time his sentence—which seems to imply that the “theology” which the three are creating in their discussion will tumble all comers, from the side of the mystic pietists as well as from the philosophers—spells the name Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), a twentieth-century phenomenologist of religion who takes Rāmānuja’s side against Śaṅkara in the “battle for God.” Otto argues, quite correctly I think, that Rāmānuja is as interesting a “theologian” as a “philosopher”—his philosophy is, however important, a *tool* to be confirmed by experience and grace. Cf. Carman 1974, 200.

27. A theological school of dialecticians (their naming means literally “the takers”) who are criticized by Halevi in *The Kuzari* V.10.

28. From Halevi’s “Nature and Law” (*Poems* 173).

29. Endymion is a figure from classical Greek mythology whose beauty caused the moon to fall in love with him while he was sleeping on Mount Latmos. She made him sleep everlastingly so that she could look upon his beauty for ever. In this sentence of Rāmānuja, “Endymion’s route” thus implies the state of dormancy. Thus, his meaning seems to be: Unless these truths stay dormant, let God-who-is-in-the-Self reveal the connection between God (*Nārāyaṇa*) and the “I.” Where the Indian learned his Greek mythology cannot be ascertained...

30. Here we have a subliminal invocation of Protestant Reformer and Saxon firebrand Martin Luther (1483–1546), for whom, as with Rāmānuja, “works” without faith are useless, and “justification” ultimately comes through “faith” alone (Cf. *Gīta* 17.28: “but work done without faith is ASAT, is nothing: sacri-

fice, gift, or self-harmony done without faith are nothing, both in this world and in the world to come”; and Luther, in his “Preface to the New Testament”: “the gospel demands no works to make us holy and to redeem us. Indeed, it condemns such works, and demands only faith in Christ...”). Rāmānuja’s use of anagrams may well be in deference to Halevi’s own tradition, and the Kabbalistic penchant for acrostics in particular, or he may have picked up this talent from his own beloved pupil Kuruttalvar, who penned a cryptic acrostic poem entitled *Yamakaratnakaram*, before his eyes were plucked out in defiance of Rāmānuja’s persecutor, the Cola king.

31. “One who *knows* Brahman attains the Supreme” (*Tait. Up.* II.1); “He who *knows* Brahman becomes Brahman” (*Mand. Up.* III.2.9).

32. From Halevi’s “Nature and Law” (*Poems* 173).

33. Jehudah echoes verbatim Héloïse’s words to Abelard in Letter I of their famed correspondence (*Letters* 114).

34. The newborn child, Mosheh ben Maimon (Arabic name Musa ibn Maimun, but known to the world as Maimonides), is of course the great Jewish scholar who would write the influential *More Rehobin* (Guide to the Perplexed), and who would attempt to fuse Aristotelian and classical thinking with Jewish faith and learning. Alas, Maimonides was *not* destined to bask in the “light” of Córdoba, as the tolerant intellectual center dimmed with the Almohad overthrow of the Almoravids in 1145, and with the continuing “success” of the Christian *reconquista* of the Iberian peninsula. His family was forced to renounce their faith and flee to North Africa and the Middle East, where Maimonides died (in Cairo) in 1204.

35. L.: “I think we are on the same wavelength.”

36. Abelard “quotes” Martin M. Tweedale, a modern commentator, who says that this phrase can be seen as “the ontological consequence of Abelard’s logic and semantics” (Tweedale 1976, 304). McCallum notes, especially in his *Dialogue*, Abelard’s “penchant for religious reconciliation that must have been as rare in the Middle Ages as it has been until very recent years” (2); indeed, one could say this attitude was almost unheard of, in Christianity, before Raymond Lull (1232–1316) and Nicolas Cusanus (1401–64), and rare even in the time of G. E. Lessing (1729–81), whose 18th-century play of tolerance *Nathan der Weise* was an anomaly. It might be noteworthy to add that, as Abelard was seeking these “points of contact,” his nemesis Bernard of Clairvaux was busy preaching the Second Crusade against the “infidel,” in 1146.

37. “Let our meditation be on the glorious light of Savitri [“Impeller,” god of the rising and setting sun]. May this light illumine our minds” (Quoted in Mascaró’s Introduction to the *Bhagavad-gīta*, 10). This is the famous *gayatri*, a prayer which has been on the morning lips of Indians for some three millenia.

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